

A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



William E. Barry
1846-1932

In the literature of the Colonial Revival, a nostalgic movement that arose around the time of the centennial of American independence, Maine became renowned for her well-preserved, picturesque villages and for her people whose lives recalled a simpler, pre-industrial past. Embracing this vision, some Maine authors joined in the literary side of the Colonial Revival, while a number of the state's native sons took their knowledge of Maine's early buildings to Boston to begin careers with some of the best-known architectural firms participating in the revival. William Edward Barry, a Kennebunk native, is a significant figure in the movement as both a chronicler of Maine's past and as a draughtsman who creatively incorporated eighteenth and early nineteenth century forms into new designs.

William Barry was the son of Sarah Lord and Charles Edward Barry, a ship's captain who was lost

at sea in 1851.¹ Educated in local schools and at Jacob Abbott's "Little Blue" school in Farmington, Maine,² Barry began his architectural career in the office of William Ralph Emerson, a distant relative who had spent part of his childhood in Kennebunk. The two shared an interest in colonial architecture; in 1869 Emerson delivered a lecture on the destruction of older New England houses and was involved during the same year in renovating the Old Ship Church in Hingham, Massachusetts.³ While under Emerson's tutelage, Barry learned perspective drawing and made plans for mantelpieces and other details from Emerson's sketches.⁴

Barry left Emerson's employ in 1866 and after a brief return to Kennebunk joined the firm of Martin and Thayer as a draughtsman in their office at Pemberton Square, Boston.⁵ Samuel J. F. Thayer was the architect responsible for the Dartmouth College Library and the Providence, Rhode Island City Hall.⁶ Abel C. Martin, a graduate of the Scientific School at Harvard College, dissolved his partnership with Thayer in 1867, thus ending Barry's brief tenure with the firm.⁷

In 1869 Barry went to work for the firm of Hartwell and Swasey (also located at Pemberton Square) and helped to prepare plans for a number of "picturesque" country houses.⁸ A trip to Philadelphia and Washington interrupted his employment with Hartwell & Swasey and was followed by a longer tour of the South in 1871. In frequent letters to his family in Kennebunk, Barry told of visits to sites of architectural and historical distinction, including Mt. Vernon, which he called "a noble location" and "the fit home of such a character as Washington".⁹

Returning to Boston, Barry joined Peabody and Stearns as one of the first two draughtsman hired by the young architectural firm.¹⁰ The earliest Peabody and Stearns project with which Barry is thought to have helped is the Nathan Matthews house of 1871-72 at Newport, Rhode Island,¹¹ a picturesque structure based on the Norman architecture which Robert Peabody studied while at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.¹² In 1877 and 1878 Barry is thought to have contributed to the design of Pierre Lorillard's "Breakers" at Newport, Rhode Island and to that of



Figure 1. Coventry Hall, York (top), William Lord House, Kennebunk (bottom) from *Pen Sketches*, Boston, 1874 (Courtesy The Brick Store Museum).

the Dickinson School at Deerfield, Massachusetts. While both "Breakers" and the Dickinson School share with the earlier Matthews house an unorthodox use of forms drawn from the English Queen Anne, the school building incorporates two freely-interpreted Palladian windows, marking the emergence of Peabody's (and Barry's) "colonial" sensibility.¹³ The Dickinson School also anticipates John W. Denny's house at Brush Hill in Milton, Massachusetts as well as the "Cliffs", a house which was the first independent commission of Arthur Little. A fellow draughtsman in the Peabody and Stearns office, Little is believed to have been assisted by Barry in the development of the "Cliffs" design.¹⁴

Robert Peabody continually admonished his draughtsmen to sketch and may have encouraged Barry to publish drawings he had made of primarily Federal-period building in the mid-Atlantic region, the southern ports and the Boston area. Barry also included sketches of his grandfather's house in Kennebunk and of "Coventry Hall" in York, Maine (Figure 1) in *Pen Sketches of Old Houses* which was privately printed in a small edition by James R. Osgood in 1874. Osgood was the publisher of the *American Architect and Building News* and also published books by Henry W. Longfellow and Sarah Orne Jewett as well as Robert Peabody's *Note Book Sketches* in 1873.¹⁵



Figure 2. Robertson House, 1874, Kennebunkport, Perspective View (Courtesy The Brick Store Museum).

Yet William Barry's architectural knowledge was not limited to American buildings. In 1872 he embarked on a voyage to Europe where he visited the most distinguished architectural monuments on the continent and in Great Britain. Barry remarked upon the ongoing vernacular revival in England where "much of the new...was built in the style of the old."¹⁶

In 1875 Barry married Florence Wallingford Hooper of Kennebunk. For the following seven years the couple lived in Melrose, Massachusetts where their two children, Ernest Lord (1877-1886) and Helen Wallingford (1880-1907) were born. Barry thought constantly of Kennebunk, and in 1883 he purchased his wife's ancestral home there, "Wallingford Hall", and moved his family back to Maine.¹⁷ Barry continued to spend part of the year in Boston where he worked for the architectural firm of Cabot and Chandler. Although little is known of Barry's work for the firm, Cabot and Chandler produced a number of Queen Anne houses in the Back Bay section of Boston during the late 1870s and early 1880s.¹⁸

Working alone in his Kennebunk home, William Barry had few clients who were willing to indulge his architectural fancy that is so apparent in surviving sketch books. Yet the development of the Kennebunks as a summer resort brought new building to the area and provided some important commissions for the architect. Barry's spirited designs for seaside cottages reveal much about his architectural sensibilities and reflect an interest in both European and American buildings, combining elements of the Shingle, Colonial Revival and Queen Anne styles. Most clearly patterned after earlier forms is Barry's design for the Robertson house (Figure 2) of 1894 at Kennebunkport. With its monitor modelled after that on his grandfather William Lord's house (Figure 1), Barry's plan recalls Federal-period architecture, while an encircling deck adapts it for summer residency. Built about five years later, the Frank Harris cottage (Figure 3) at Kennebunk Beach is one of Barry's most



Figure 3. Frank Harris Cottage, c. 1890, Kennebunk Beach (Author).

successful compositions. A simple rectangle, the house receives a dramatic embellishment through a secondary gabled pavilion which projects at a right angle from the principle facade, with a first story semi-circular bay composed of a series of arched windows. Barry is also thought to have designed a cottage for his cousin Kate Lord, which was built on Lord's Point, Kennebunk Beach during the 1890s (Figure 4).¹⁹ This playful composition features stick elements that enliven the wall surfaces, a seahorse and dolphins that decorate a dormer, and a bird-shaped weathervane that flies above the long roof. A more sedate work is the cottage Barry designed for Dr. Nott on Parsons Beach in 1901. In contrast to the use of the playful detailing Barry favours elsewhere, this Shingle Style house rests calmly under a broad gambrel roof punctuated by massive dormers.

Like his plans for domestic structures, Barry's designs for commercial, religious, civic, and educational buildings often represent curious hybrids of Queen Anne and Shingle Style forms. Yet Barry's work can also wax classical as is demonstrated by the Thornton Academy Library (Figure 5) in Saco which he designed in 1903.

Despite his active architectural career, the pursuit to which Barry devoted much of his attention, particularly after returning to Kennebunk, was recording local history. In numerous publications, *A Stroll by a Familiar River* (1909), *Chronicles of Kennebunk* (1923), *A Stroll Thro' the Past* (1933) and others, Barry presents a romanticized picture of the lives of the early settlers and in all of his literary works uses old buildings to symbolize "bygone days and ways". So too, Barry believed the architectural heritage of Kennebunk should be preserved as a tangible reminder of the past. His most significant preservation effort was the restoration of Jefferds Tavern in Wells, Maine which he undertook in 1922 (Figure 6). Believing the building should be maintained for its associational value — a group of Revolutionary War soldiers was thought to have camped on its grounds — Barry had the building structurally stabilized and sheathed in new clapboards.²⁰ Until his death in 1932 he operated Jefferds Tavern as an informal historical museum, fill-



Figure 4. Kate Lord Cottage, 1890s, Kennebunk Beach (c. 1900 Photo Courtesy The Brick Store Museum).

ed with "relics" of frontier Maine. After Barry's death, Miss Elizabeth Perkins had the Tavern moved to its present location in York Village. At the same time, Edith Cleaves Barry, William Barry's niece, founded The Brick Store Museum in Kennebunk as a tribute to this work as an antiquarian and historian and as a permanent repository for his collections.

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September, 1984



Figure 5. Thornton Academy Library, 1905, Saco (c. 1910 Postcard View, MHPC).

Notes

- ¹ Norman E. Borden, Jr., *Dear Sarah*, (Freeport, 1966), passim.
- ² William E. Barry, *Reminiscences of Little Blue*, (manuscript Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum, 1916), n.p.
- ³ Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *The Architecture of William Ralph Emerson, 1833-1917* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 3-4, 88-89.
- ⁴ William E. Barry to Sarah Cleaves Perkins, Sunday, February, 1865, and William E. Barry to Sarah Cleaves Perkins, Sunday, October, 1865 (Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum).
- ⁵ William E. Barry to Sarah Cleaves Perkins, December 14, 1866 (Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum).
- ⁶ Obituary of Samuel J. F. Thayer, *American Architect and Building News*, Vol. 39 (March 4, 1893), p. 130.
- ⁷ Obituary of A. C. Martin, *American Architect and Building News*, Vol. 6, No. 8 (November 8, 1879), p. 145.
- ⁸ William E. Barry to Sarah Cleaves Perkins, February 7, 1869 (Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum).

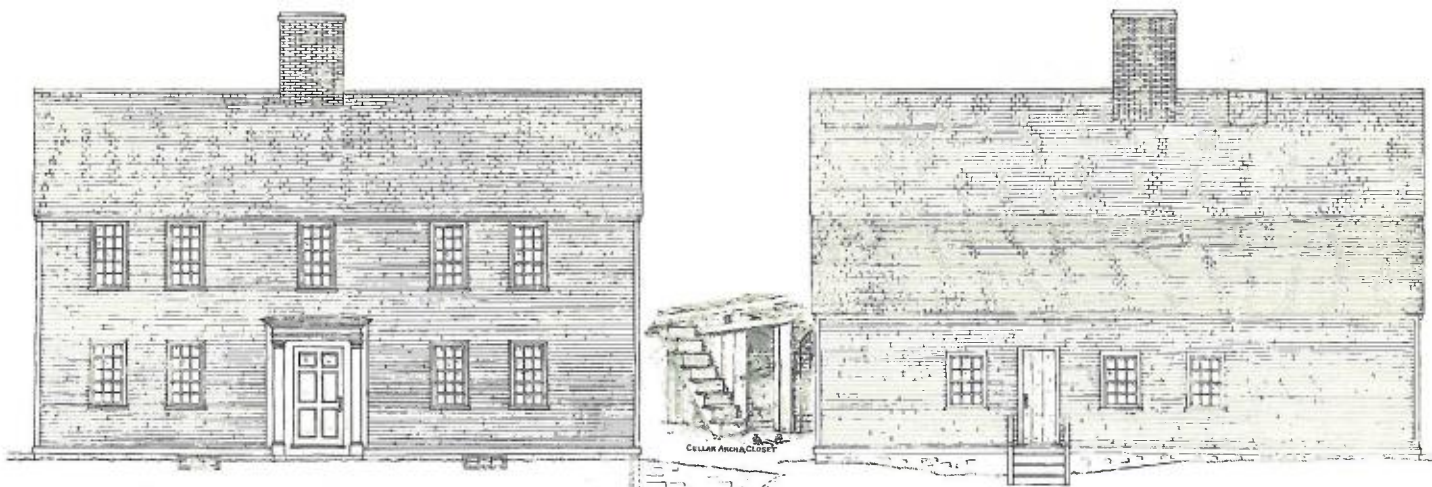


Figure 6. Jefferds Tavern, Wells. Elevations and Interior Details, 1922-23 (Courtesy Old York Historical Society).

- ⁹ William E. Barry to Sarah Cleaves Perkins, February, 1871 (Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum).
- ¹⁰ Wheaton A. Holden, *Robert Swain Peabody of Peabody and Stearns in Boston, The Early Years (1870-1886)* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1969).
- ¹¹ William E. Barry to Sarah Cleaves Perkins, August, 1871 (Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum).
- ¹² Sara Bradford Landau, "Richard Morris Hunt, the Continental Picturesque and the 'Stick Style'", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. XLII, No. 3, October, 1983, p. 287.
- ¹³ Wheaton A. Holden, "The Peabody Touch: Peabody and Stearns of Boston, 1870-1917", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (May, 1973), p. 114, fn.
- ¹⁴ Walter Knight Sturges, "Arthur Little and the Colonial Revival", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (May, 1973), pp. 151-152.
- ¹⁵ Holden, *The Peabody Touch...*, p. 117.
- ¹⁶ William E. Barry to Sarah Cleaves Perkins, May 14, 1872 (Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum).
- ¹⁷ Joyce Butler, "Chronology of the Life of William E. Barry" (manuscript, Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum). Barry's uncle, Hartley Lord, built a large summer home in Kennebunk in 1884-85 and Barry may have assisted architect George Meachum in its construction.
- ¹⁸ Brainbridge Bunting, *Houses of Boston's Back Bay* (Cambridge and London, 1967), pp. 233-235.
- ¹⁹ This attribution is based on sketches in Barry's notebooks.
- ²⁰ William E. Barry, hand-written account of the history of Jefferds Tavern (Barry Collection, The Brick Store Museum).

List of Known Commissions in Maine by William E. Barry

Portico and Piazza for Taylor-Barry House, 24 Summer Street, Kennebunk, 1872-73, Extant.
 Receiving Tomb, Hope Cemetery, Kennebunk, 1885, Extant.
 Frank Harris Cottage, Kennebunk Beach, c. 1890, Extant.
 Renovation of William Bartlett House, Portland Road, Kennebunk, 1890s, Extant.
 Dr. Ross Apartment Building, Grove Street, Kennebunk, 1890s, Extant.
 Additions to Hartley Lord House, 26 Summer Street, Kennebunk, 1890s, Extant.
 Kate Lord Cottage, Kennebunk Beach, 1890s, Demolished.
 Robertson House, Main and Spring Streets, Kennebunkport, 1894, Extant.
 Interior Renovations of Baptist Church, Main Street, Kennebunk, 1894, Extant.
 Addition to Park Street School, Kennebunk, 1899, Demolished.
 Addition to Glen cottage (Bonnie Brig Tea Room), Kings Highway, Kennebunkport, 1901, Altered.

Third Story Addition to Ross Block, Main Street, Kennebunk, 1901, Extant.
 Dr. Nott Cottage, Parsons Beach, 1901, Extant.
 Remodel Facade of Lunge's Store, Kennebunk, 1903, Demolished.
 Renovations to the Glen House, Kennebunkport, 1903, Demolished.
 Seavey House, Chestnut Street, Kennebunkport, 1903, Extant.
 Thornton Academy Library, Saco, 1903, Extant.
 Roberts House, Portland Road, Kennebunk, 1904-05, Extant.
 Thornton Academy Headmaster's House, Saco, 1905, Extant.
 St. Monica's Catholic Church (now Lutheran Church), Storer Street, Kennebunk, 1905, Extant.
 Addition to the Columbia Hotel, Kennebunkport, 1905, Demolished.
 Addition to Cliff House, Kennebunkport, 1906, Demolished.
 Calderwood and Sons Store, Biddeford, 1908, Unknown.
 George Stevens House, Grandview Avenue, Kennebunkport, 1909, Extant.
 Addition to Weinstein's Store, Dock Square, Kennebunkport, 1909, Extant.
 Addition to Edward I. Downing House, Pleasant Street, Kennebunk, c. 1910, Extant.
 Wells Town Hall, Wells, 1910-11, Demolished.
 Renovations and Additions to Almira McArthur House, Middle Street, Saco, 1915-1917, Extant.

Architectural Drawings

Drawings for the Additions to the Cliff House are in the possession of The Brick Store Museum. The McArthur House drawings are owned by the York Institute in Saco. Measured drawings for the Hartley Lord House, the Roberts House and the Downing House are privately owned. Barry's plans, elevations and interior sketches for the restoration of the Jefferds Tavern belong to the Old York Historical Society.

Sources:

Much of the information about William Barry's architectural commissions on which this article is based was gathered by Sandra Hubka and Joyce Butler in preparation for an exhibit on Barry mounted at The Brick Store Museum in 1982. This museum is the repository for the Barry Papers, which include several volumes of the architect's sketchbooks and his account book.

Photograph of William E. Barry
 Courtesy of The Brick Store Museum.

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